



CONGRESSIONAL HISPANIC CAUCUS
Joaquin Castro | Chairman
116TH CONGRESS

March 19, 2020

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Speaker of the House
HC-5, The Capitol
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Speaker Pelosi,

Our nation is currently confronting an unprecedented public health crisis with the emerging threat of novel coronavirus, otherwise known as COVID-19. In response, our country has taken necessary measures to slow the spread of the virus to save lives, which unfortunately has caused a significant decrease in the country's economic activity. Many experts are now warning of a recession. In short, as other global leaders have stated, we are dealing with a twin crisis: on the one hand, a public health crisis; and on the other, an economic crisis. As Congress works to pass an economic stimulus legislative package to provide relief to businesses, communities and families across the country, the Congressional Hispanic Caucus (CHC) respectfully writes to you to share our priorities for legislation intended to mitigate the effects of this crisis.

The Latino population powers the U.S. economy and our community makes up an overwhelming share of the U.S. labor market force. If the U.S. Latino population were considered an independent economy, it would rank as the 8th largest economy in the world. Further, the Stanford Latino Entrepreneurship Initiative's research shows that over the past decade, the number of U.S. Latino business owners grew by 34% when compared to all business owners in the country. Given that Latinos are projected to make up 30% of the U.S. population by 2030, it is critical to consider how any legislation will impact U.S. Latino businesses and families when deliberating what actions Congress should take in support of the long-term fiscal health of the country.

Additionally, the CHC underscores that all relief provided should be extended to all persons residing in the United States, regardless of citizenship status. COVID-19 does not differentiate between citizens and immigrants, just as it doesn't differentiate between the wealthy and poor. Any legislative package that excludes immigrant communities will endanger public health and undermine our economic recovery. Ensuring that immigrants and legal residents have equal access to health care services and financial relief is imperative to the preservation of our nation's public and fiscal health. Moreover, legislation should include an across-the-board restriction against the transfer and re-programming of funds for the purposes of funding immigration enforcement, immigration detention, wall construction, and any efforts that advance the Trump Administration's anti-immigration agenda. Immigration enforcement is currently an anti-public health enterprise as it disincentivizes individuals to seek the help they need, resulting in a higher likelihood of spreading COVID-19 to their family members, their neighbors or coworkers. Furthermore, the CHC would like to underscore the importance of treating U.S. territories in the same manner as states under all legislation related to COVID-19 response efforts. Time and time again, we have seen territories often left out or treated unequally in key federal legislation, which only serves to disadvantage and hurt American constituents. We urge you to keep these principles in mind as you draft forthcoming legislation.

Below, please find the priorities of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus:

The Economy

U.S. Latino communities are critical to our local economies and have been a major driver of our economic growth since the last recession. Latinos are driving our country's gross domestic product and are fundamental to the American workforce across industries and job sectors. During the last recession, Latinos and their families across the country and in American

territories like Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Northern Mariana Islands were left behind. According to the Pew Research Center, the U.S. Hispanic population experienced the greatest drop in wealth during the Great Recession.

- Provide direct and equal cash payments to all low- and middle-income individuals, who file federal or territorial income tax returns, regardless of citizenship status;
- Provide a moratorium on all evictions, foreclosures, repossessions, all mortgage interest rates, debt collection, and wage garnishments during the pandemic;
- Suspend all negative consumer credit reporting during the pandemic and 120 days after;
- Suspend HUD's consideration of the mixed status family rule for public housing;
- Include strict conditions for industry bailout, including prohibitions on funding provided for stock buybacks;
- Ensure Hispanic-owned money management firms, investment banks, and broker dealers are included in any market stimulus package;
- Expand paid family leave and sick leave, and establish an enhanced unemployment benefit to cover lost wages;
- Provide direct grants to state and territories to make up for government revenue losses experienced as a result of COVID-19;
- Provide relief to independent contractors; food and service industry workers; domestic workers such as housekeepers; farm workers; and others who may not qualify for unemployment or paid leave;
- Make whole local governments in states and territories for lost tax revenue as a result of tourism and hospitality disruption during the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially, but not limited to Transient Occupancy Tax (hotel tax) revenue;
- Provide an employee retention tax credit for businesses paying workers who are not working;
- Include direct aid to small nonprofits whose donations are declining during the pandemic and ensure that nonprofits receive the same economic relief as businesses;
- Financial assistance for families who cannot meet the 30 percent adjusted gross income contribution required of HUD housing assistance programs;
- Provide relief efforts for the homeless population and childcare needs;
- Closely monitor predatory market activity.

Small Business

There are 4.37 million Hispanic-owned businesses that contribute \$700 billion to the U.S. economy each year. Hispanic entrepreneurs start businesses at three times the rate of the average American. Latinas, specifically, are five times more likely to start a business. For the past 15 years, the five-year growth rate of Hispanic-owned firms has been double the national average.

- Suspend all consumer and small business credit payments;
- Streamline and simplify access to emergency direct loans to Latino small businesses by strengthening Community Development Financial Institutions (CDFIs). CDFIs are best positioned to responsibly deliver capital that meet the needs of minority small business owners;
- Provide a small and medium enterprise loan guarantee program;
- Reduce interest rates for disaster loans for small businesses to less than 1 percent;
- Provide grants to small businesses whose business have been impacted – directly or indirectly – due to public health emergencies stemming from COVID-19 worth a maximum of \$100,000 per small businesses;
- Include additional direct assistance to small and medium sized businesses located in distressed census tracts.

Health Care

Hispanic health is often shaped by factors such as language and cultural barriers, lack of access to preventative care, and the lack of health insurance. Unfortunately, Hispanics have the highest uninsured rate of any racial or ethnic group within the U.S., are disproportionately affected by chronic disease and suffer from health inequities. Special attention needs to be paid to the unique health needs of the Hispanic community who require culturally competent care and stable access to health care services.

- Ensure public assistance and emergency announcements are multilingual and culturally sensitive;
- Provide robust funding for Federally Qualified Health Centers, Community Health Centers, rural health clinics, Indian Health Centers, U.S.- Mexico Border Health Commission, border health grants, Early Warning Infectious Disease Surveillance (EWIDS) in the border areas, urban Indian health organizations, Indian Health Services Support, and Bureau of Indian Affairs Tribal Priority Allocations, which is in addition to the \$100

million for Community Health Centers that was included in the recent bipartisan package earlier this month, and in addition to the reauthorization of the Community Health Center Fund which must be done before May 22nd;

- Provide coverage for all treatments related to COVID-19 for all uninsured individuals, regardless of citizenship status, including no cost-sharing coverage;
- Address IT and infrastructure needs to enable maximum telehealth capabilities;
- Ensure production of needed hospital and testing supplies; personal protective equipment; ventilators; face masks; cotton swabs, and other critical resources;
- Strengthen health care workforce backup by engaging with DMAT, FEMA, Coast Guard to help cover surge needs and identify a program to have foreign-trained physicians residing in the US but working in a non-medical field to support workforce shortages;
- Reduce over the counter medication costs;
- Provide solutions to help individuals who suffer from diabetes who are already struggling to afford insulin;
- Develop solutions to protect pregnant women and infants during prenatal care, childbirth, and the postpartum period. Ensure that they have access and coverage for telehealth prenatal care, alternative providers, non-hospital birth settings, and postpartum support;
- Provide solutions to help individuals impacted by the unique mental health challenges posed by the COVID-19 outbreak;
- Address the health care insurance needs for workers who have lost their jobs and thus their health insurance;
- Protect individuals in congregate settings, including mental health facilities, homeless shelters, nursing homes, prisons, jails, and immigration detention centers;
- Extend Good Samaritan protections for providers who volunteer in a declared disaster/public health emergency;

Immigration

Prioritizing the health and safety of workers and detainees in immigration detention centers and those in the asylum system is paramount. Adequate and humane plans must be executed to minimize the spread and number of fatalities on the U.S. government's watch. Enacted plans must eliminate the fear of immigrant communities to come forward and obtain the help they need. Immigrant health is public health.

- Release of non-priority detainees in ICE and CBP custody especially vulnerable populations, such as pregnant women, individuals with disabilities, LGBTQ individuals, and those with severe illness, and the safe and swift placement of children, who are currently under ORR custody, into homes;
- The suspension of the Trump Administration's new "Inadmissibility on Public Charge Grounds" rule;
- The suspension of immigration enforcement activities across the country, including but not limited to:
 - Interior Border Patrol checkpoints that may interfere with border communities' ability to access medical care;
 - Sensitive sites like hospitals, clinics, labs and other locations that are critical for families impacted by COVID-19, including locations used for food distribution and emergency shelters.
- Ensure the U.S. government follows CDC guidelines for everyone in their custody (test, treatment, vaccines, etc.)

The 2020 Census

Latinos, and especially Latino children, have been historically undercounted in the decennial census for decades. In 2010 alone, nearly 400,000 Latino children under the age of five were undercounted, which has effects on long-term health, financial, and educational outcomes. Latino communities also include mixed status households and language barriers that present additional challenges to ensuring an accurate count. The current coronavirus pandemic demonstrates how critical it is to ensure an accurate count of the U.S. population in order to adequately fund public health programs that many rely on to stay healthy. While the coronavirus pandemic requires operational and messaging changes to the Census Bureau's plans, it is more important now than ever before that the Bureau ensure all Latinos are counted.

- Direct the U.S. Census Bureau to utilize its secretarial contingency funding and risk-based contingency funding to the maximum extent to accommodate operational changes and new paid advertisements, including advertisements in Spanish, to inform the public on the safest ways to participate in the decennial census during the coronavirus pandemic.

Education

More Hispanics than ever are attending college in the hopes of achieving the American dream and securing a place in the middle class. While we have made strides in Hispanic student enrollment and graduation rates, inequity for Latino students persists. Latinos are now the largest population of color enrolled in the U.S. postsecondary system. Moreover, Hispanic Serving Institutions are the largest group of minority-serving institutions and are expected to grow even more over the next fifteen years. A college degree remains the surest path to economic mobility, particularly for low-income families and people of color.

- Ensure robust Title I funding to ensure schools that serve students from low-income communities have the resources required to adjust instruction plans and close the digital divide during the coronavirus pandemic and after;
- Suspend student loan payments;
- Set aside \$1.5 billion for minority-serving institutions, which are traditionally under resourced, to adapt to the crisis and still serve students;
- Ensure college students remain eligible for public benefits despite work requirements, which may not be able to be met during the pandemic;
- Help underserved college students who find themselves suddenly homeless and unemployed;
- Provide flexibility to use grant awards for emergency needs, like purchasing laptops and relocation expenses;
- Establish financial protections for students forced to retake any class;
- Make Indian Health Services Loan Repayment and Scholarship Programs Tax Exempt.

U.S. Territories

Millions of Americans live in the U.S. territories, including American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, Guam, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands. U.S. territories are often subject to unequal treatment under federal programs. Delivery of health care services and health care access is an everyday challenge, due to the remoteness, geography, and financial situation of most U.S. territories. Moreover, many U.S. territories depend heavily on tourism, which has come to a grinding halt during this pandemic, resulting in even greater economic stress. Decades of unequal treatment has created a disadvantage for territories to withstand and weather crises. A uniform approach on par with the states will position territories for optimal stability.

- Ensure parity under any legislation signed into law, which will result in a stronger recovery for our entire country;
- Expand block grants and tax credit programs to all U.S. territories;
- Eliminate structural inequities in federal programming and cash assistance in supplemental legislation;
- Approve waiver of matching funds requirements associated with federal programs for U.S. territories experiencing proven economic hardship;
- Inclusion of the House-passed Emergency Supplemental Appropriations for Disaster Relief and Puerto Rico Disaster Tax Relief Act, H.R. 5687.

Diversity Policy Riders for Industry

As Congress evaluates economic proposals to mitigate the effects of the coronavirus on various industry sectors, we must ensure that companies receiving taxpayer-funds are actively working on improving diversity and inclusion.


While the CHC has been working on improving diversity across all sectors, we have focused our efforts in the accurate portrayal and representation of Latinos in film and media. The entertainment industry has a history of erasure and inaccurate portrayal of Latinos. When it comes to casting Latino talent, hiring Latino storytellers, and greenlighting projects centered on Latino storylines, the entertainment industry has a track record of leaving our community out of the picture. We have worked on various policy proposals aimed at increasing diversity in the entertainment industry and if funding is provided to the entertainment industry via the economic stimulus package, we would like to see these policy proposals included:

- Require that all major film companies and studios that receive stimulus funds report on the diversity for both above-the-line and below-the-line workers for their film projects currently in development and in projects moving forward. All stimulus fund recipients must report on this data in a disaggregated fashion, i.e. the number of Latinos, the number of African-Americans, the number of Asian-Americans, and others;


- Require that all stimulus fund recipients commit to hiring more Latinos both in front of and behind the camera. Recipients must provide hiring goals and report to Congress on their progress on these metrics by the end of each fiscal year;
- Require that all stimulus fund recipients provide a plan to Congress on how they will advance and promote Latinos to decision-making positions in project greenlighting, finance, marketing, public relations, and other executive roles at their companies;
- Require that all stimulus fund recipients establish a budget to greenlight projects helmed by people of color and members of the LGBTQ community;
- Commit to streamlining their efforts to hire Latino talent through partnerships with non-profit organizations;
- Require a commitment from major entertainment companies to move away from gig and contracting business models and to instead provide a plan for formalizing their hiring processes to ensure that Latinos are not financially excluded from entering the workforce;
- Commit to maintaining Diversity & Inclusion departments and not eliminating these important departments as companies consider reducing budgets and downsizing;
- Provide assistance to small businesses who support the entertainment industry like equipment rental companies, hospitality, sound engineers, and make-up artists;
- Address the needs of non-profit organizations that are already leading the way in working with diverse talent by providing financial assistance.

We appreciate your consideration of these CHC priorities. If you have any questions, please reach out to the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Executive Director, Alma Acosta.


Sincerely,




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